

HOW CAN COMPULSORY EDUCATION  
BE MADE TO WORK IN  
ENGLAND ?

BY

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REPRINTED, WITH ALTERATIONS, FROM 'THE FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW:' WITH  
A POSTSCRIPT ON EDUCATION IN THE PLAINTING DISTRICTS.

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LONDON:  
LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.  
1870.

LONDON: PRINTED BY  
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE  
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

## HOW CAN COMPULSORY EDUCATION BE MADE TO WORK IN ENGLAND ?

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PROBABLY the first feeling which will take possession of the minds of practical men now that Mr. Forster's Education Act has become law, will be an almost overpowering sense of the magnitude of the work which the nation has begun by passing it. In the words of Mr. Carlyle, written more than thirty years ago, 'The intellect of a Bacon, the energy of a Luther, might pause in dismay before such a task ; a Bacon and a Luther added together to be perpetual prime minister over us could not do it.'

The magnitude of the work.

To the question—What can ? Mr. Carlyle gives the only possible answer : 'Only twenty-four million ordinary intellects once awakened into action ; these well presided over, may.' But how are they to be awakened into action ? How, but by having a clear understanding of what the task before them is, a firm conviction of its necessity, and a well grounded faith that it *can* be accomplished ?

First,—What is the education which this Bill is to place within reach of every child in the realm ? The answer is :—Education means far more than

What Elementary Education is.

mere instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic. It means the *training which it is needful to give to children in order that they may have a fair start in life*; and 'elementary education' is that part of it which can be given in elementary schools.

Why the State must interfere to secure the education of children.

Secondly,—Why is the nation, the State, to see that this training is given to children? The answer is that it is the acknowledged duty of the State to look specially after the rights of those classes in the nation who cannot protect themselves. The largest of these helpless classes is undoubtedly that of *children*. They are weak and helpless, in fact and in the eye of the law. A cruel and irreparable wrong is done to them if they are allowed to grow up without that training which is needful to give them a fair start in life; and therefore it becomes the duty of the State to see that they are not recklessly robbed of it. It is because a very large proportion of the children of England are known to be rising up without the requisite training, that now, after thirty years' talk and delay, Parliament has passed the Education Act of 1870.

The necessity of School Boards.

Thirdly,—How is the State under the provisions of the Act to undertake this duty? The answer is:—By means of local School Boards under Government inspection. I say by School Boards, because they are the only machinery provided by the Act for grappling with the difficulty. Sectarian agencies are indeed straining every nerve to shelve the action of the Act, and to prevent the establishment of School Boards, by showing that without them sufficient school accommodation can be pro-

vided. But the provision of empty school-rooms will not touch the root of the evil. When they have made the needful provision of schools, the necessity for School Boards will be more apparent than ever, in order to secure the attendance of the children.

Assuming then the election of a School Board as a thing of necessity, how ought it to set about its work? Almost its first work will be to use the powers given to it by the Act, not only to ascertain the number of schools and provide the lacking school accommodation (if any), but also to construct a register of the names and ages of all the children in every street, alley, and yard, in the parish, and of the names of the schools (if any) at which the children attend. When this is done, and not till then, will the Board be able to lay its hand on the half-dozen children here, and the dozen there, who do not go to school, and by its school messenger to ascertain the reasons why they are not at school. Without this how can they grapple with their main work of getting *all* the children to school?

The necessity of a registry of children.

This preliminary labour being accomplished, the Board having its register before it, and therefore knowing what children do not go to school, will probably ask the practical question:—How is compulsory education to be made to work in England? How are these children to be got to school?

Where are we to begin? I believe there is but The work.

must begin with the provision of efficient infant schools.

one answer, though it is often overlooked—viz., *at the beginning*. Let it be remembered that the education of the poor man's child begins at a far earlier age than that of the richer man's. The parent of the middle class seldom sends his children to school till they are eight years old. But you might just as well try to begin to build a house at the first floor, instead of at the foundation storey, as expect to be able to educate the children of the working classes of England by beginning with them at eight years old. The National Society, I understand, advocates the indirect compulsion of the half-time Act as the only system of compulsion which will work in England. You will never educate England by leaving her children in the streets till they are eight years old; and then, when they begin to work and earn wages, sending them to half-time schools.

There could not be a worse point at which to begin compulsory education than just that at which, having grown up into street and field Arabs, children begin to add something to their parents' earnings. You could not begin it at a point where it would be felt to be more of a hardship; and, therefore, would be more hateful to the classes you wish to reach by it. Moreover, it is too late to begin to educate these children. By eight years old they are already educated and started in their Arab life, and your notions of education will fly over their heads. The little street Arab of eight years old is probably more highly educated (though in a wrong direction) than any other child of that

age. His wits are prematurely sharpened. His cunning and activity are alike unnaturally developed. A knowledge of vice is frightfully easy to pick up in the streets; and thus it is that such children, though naturally as good as others, become so often precociously bad. The seeds of vicious habits, planted in infancy, not only bear early fruit, but, as they have been planted in a virgin soil, take deep and permanent root. Educated wrongly, you cannot uneducate them and re-educate them rightly in four years of half-time schooling. Whence I conclude that national education, to be successful, must begin at the beginning—must begin at as early an age as the child's education begins outside its home, so that it may go out of home into the school instead of into the streets.

And there is this incidental advantage in beginning early, that by doing so you begin at an age when it is a *boon*, and not a loss, to parents to send their children to school, when mothers will be glad enough to have their children off their hands for a few hours a day. In a word, national education not only *ought* to begin, but it is *easiest* for it to begin, in *infant schools*.

Now what is an infant school? First, there is what we may call the baby's room, by no means to be despised, where infants of three or four years old are taught to sit on a form, are disciplined in the first art of sitting, in the steady use of their limbs, in the habit of attending to what their teacher says, in the parrot-art of imitation, all

It is a boon and not a loss to parents to send their children to infant schools.

The training in a good infant school.



which is the very best and healthiest training for the infant's body and mind, and all which is the indispensable first step to the learning of the alphabet, and all other learning, and all which, if not accomplished between two and four, must be accomplished afterwards. No national system of education can safely ignore this. Every set of national schools in town or country must have its babies' classes for babies, whether they be three or eight years old. There is no evading it, and the earlier the age at which this first drill is given within reason, probably the better for the child and the greater the boon to the parent.

Out of this baby-drill the infant emerges into the infant school proper; and still half the education is the drill. The child, it is true, is introduced into what Mr. Carlyle calls 'the mystery of the 'alphabetic letters,' learns the multiplication table, to make pot-hooks, to spell and read words of three letters; but in proportion as the 'mistress has tact and skill, all this is made a part of the drill, and the drill in its turn is made as much like an orderly game of play as possible. It is the training and forming of the child's physical and mental powers and habits, which is the work of the infant school quite as much as the beginning of the actual teaching of the three Rs. The child learns *how* to learn, and learns obedience and self-control, and to be tidy, clean, and well-behaved; and through the simple Bible lessons from pictures and stories (not Bible reading) and the little hymns it learns to sing, it gets, or ought to get, sown in its heart the seeds of



some simple moral and religious feelings, which, if they be the first seeds sown there, will take a deeper root than is often dreamt of. A poor substitute, doubtless, any teaching of the kind must be for a good mother's own teaching to her child, but still a substitute which in proportion as the mistress is up to her work, she will succeed in giving without much fear of absolute failure.

Now apply this to the poorest quarters of our towns. Is it no boon to the mother in the dark alley, the cellar, or the attic, to have her infant children off her hands for a few hours a day? Is there anything hopeless in every street having its infant schools, and if they meet the wants of mothers will it be impossible to get the infants there? To prepare their children for the infant school will stir up in many a mother's heart dormant feelings of parental duty, and in proportion as the public infant schools are felt to be the people's own, are made efficient, and meet the wants of working men's children, surely we need not despair of their becoming popular. To make them the people's own they must be scattered everywhere. The mothers must know the mistress, and recognise in her not a mere official, but a friend; and then, without stepping from her place, without becoming a preacher, her position will become that of a sort of civil missionary, and her presence will be a civilising influence in the alley or the court in which she keeps her infant school. She will become in many cases a link between the lower and the higher classes of society, like what the clergy ought to be

if what is clerical about them did not hinder it. Several of these infant schools, if too small to have certificated teachers of their own, may well be placed under the care and responsibility of a certificated teacher, who would go his rounds and keep up the spirit of the schools and the heart of the mistress ; and so there need be no limit either to their number or to their humbleness, or to the variety of the qualifications or age of their mistresses.

The first action of compulsion will come upon the *poorest* parents when it is no loss to them to send their children to school.

And now, supposing the School Board to have begun by organising such a system of infant schools, let us for a moment fix our attention upon the first action of *compulsion* as regards the children of the poorest classes, in whose case it is said the difficulty in the way of compulsion will be greatest. If compulsion is to begin at five, as in Prussia, that class of children who attend infant schools will have already been at school for one or two years. And, as a rule, it will be the *poorest parent* whose child will enter the infant school at the earliest age. Poverty, therefore, will very seldom be the real cause of children not attending the infant school. The poor man's difficulty comes in at a later stage. The poor mother will be more likely than any other to send her infant, who cannot earn anything, to be taken care of at the infant school, so that she may have time and freedom to work herself. It may be hoped, therefore, that as a rule the children of the poorest class will be already in the school, and have learnt its benefits before the age of compulsion begins ; and in these cases the resort to compulsion

will not be needful : the cases where it is needful will be the exceptions, and not the rule. Public opinion, therefore, among the poorer classes, it may be hoped, will be on the side of attendance at the school, and the difficulties of compulsion thereby reduced to a minimum. I conclude, then, that in practice no insuperable difficulty is likely to arise as regards the infant schools. The infant schools, in so far as they are what they ought to be, will fill by attraction rather than by compulsion, and in the same proportion will this inestimable point be gained, that the first action of compulsion in the school system will be limited to exceptional cases, and merely be called in to compel in those cases what is the general practice, and what public opinion supports. Finally, if by thus beginning compulsion while attendance is a boon instead of a loss to parents, and by opening the public schools to very young children some years before the age for compulsion begins, the children can be got to school, is it for England to complain of the additional expense which thus early beginning would entail ? Better far that the children should be brought in their cradles by their mothers than be dragged into school by the police from the streets.

Compulsory powers, like conscience clauses, whilst needful as a last resort for exceptional cases, are hateful the moment they begin to apply to any large proportion of the children ; and I have thus dwelt long and pressed hard upon the necessity of infant schools, because I believe that in them lies

Infant schools the key to the healthy action of compulsion.

the key to the secret how to restrain the action of compulsory powers within the narrowest limits.

The need  
of compul-  
sion in  
excep-  
tional  
cases.

But there will be exceptional cases, where compulsion has to be really put in force. The school-messenger—let us call him the school-beadle—is, we may imagine, a local functionary, an oldish, good-natured man, perhaps hobbling on his crutch or stick, paying his visits all round, looking up the children long before the age for compulsion begins. For years before the time arrives when aid from the higher powers is called in, the school-beadle has often crossed the threshold, chatted with the children and the parents, and urged them to send the little ones to school. This has been going on perhaps for years. All good offices of neighbours have been tried in vain to get the parents to relent. Gradually, long before the age for compulsion arrives, it is known in the court or alley that ‘So and so’ is not sending his children to school, and his neglect of them is felt to be a shame. By the time the eldest child is five, public opinion is against him. He refuses to yield. His case is reported to the school board, enquiries are made, daylight is thrown into that home in the early stages of a down-hill course. If anything can stop it, and save the wife and children from ultimate ruin, surely the first step towards it has been taken when the school-beadle and the school board, and the strong arm of the law behind them, backed by public opinion, are brought to bear upon that household in defence of the rights of *the children*. The work of the school-beadle would thus be that

rather of a sort of civil missionary than of a policeman; and in protecting the children he would often save the parents also.

Looked at in this practical way, there is therefore, I conclude, ground for hope that no insuperable difficulty will be found in the way of the commencement of compulsion, if it be commenced at an age when it is clearly a boon to parents, and no loss to them, that their children should be at school.

But then, it may be said, the real difficulty of the National School system will only be postponed by the commencement at this very early age. The real difficulty will come as the children reach an age when their earnings begin.

How, then, are you to *keep* the children at school?

I will not shirk this question by simply saying that having once got the children to school half the battle is already won, though there would be some truth in such an answer. The true answer evidently is, By the extension of the half-time Acts, as far as practicable, to all kinds of work. After you have begun at the beginning, and educated the children in whole-time schools, from three or four up to eight or ten years old, half-time schools seem not only to be the most practical way of combining work and school, but regarded purely from an educational point of view, perhaps the very best means of carrying on to riper years an education, the first drudgery of

How to  
*keep* the  
children  
at school.

The half-  
time Acts  
will not  
get the  
children to  
school, but  
will *keep*  
them there.



which has been already got through in early childhood. Were you to keep the lad at school till twelve, and then let him loose altogether from school, he would forget his knowledge before he grew up to the age of starting life on his own account. It is constantly found that scholars at British and National schools who have been turned out good readers and writers, have lost their familiarity with both arts long before they are men. Hence, I am told by educationists, that a short time daily or weekly spent in schooling, scattered over four years, would be much more valuable in a purely educational point of view, than twice the time forced into two years.

It seems, therefore, that whilst on the one hand to *begin* compulsory education by half-time Acts at the age when work begins, is as futile as beginning to build a house at the first floor ; on the other hand to *carry on* compulsory education by half-time Acts, is not only reasonable in theory, but likely to be successful in practice. And it is to be hoped that not another Session will pass without the needful half-time Schooling Bill being brought by Mr. Bruce into Parliament.

But how will this overcome the poor man's difficulty? Compulsory attendance at school, when his children might be earning wages, must be somewhat of a hardship to him. And the question arises, Will compulsion at this stage be feasible? It would be idle to say that there will be no difficulty in it, or even that the difficulty will not be great. It is right that the facts of the case should

How the  
poor man's  
difficulty  
will be  
met.

fairly be looked at, and the difficulty owned and faced. But the more the facts are looked at, the more will they themselves, I think, let some rays of daylight through the difficulty, and show that it is not insurmountable.

These are some of the facts of the case which seem to me to let light through it:—

1. If the children have been at school, as undoubtedly they should have been, up to the time when wage-earning begins, the self-denial will come rather in the shape of the postponing of an untasted advantage than of the deprivation of one already tasted. Impossible it may be to take away from parents the prop on which they are already leaning, but it may be quite possible to advise them beforehand that for their children's future advantage and their own they must do without the prop a few years longer.

His children will be already at school.

2. The difficulty will come on gradually, and the half-time wages (possibly, after all, not much less than whole-time wages would otherwise have been) will, whatever their amount, come in as a relief to the parents, and as the school will often not only have had a share in producing the capacity to earn wages, but also, perhaps, in giving the lad the character which gets him employment, the continuance of half-time schooling after he has gone to work may, after all, not often be very much grudged by the parent.

They will begin to earn wages while at school.

3. At the moment when the difficulty begins with the poor parent another party to the child's schooling steps in. The school board will have to

In order to earn wages they must keep at school.



deal with the employer of labour as well as with the parent, and so, as it were, will get two strings to its bow. Not only the school board, but the employer of labour will tell the parent, 'If you want your child to earn wages you must keep him at school.'

In fact, then, I see some rays of daylight through the difficulties of 'compulsion,' provided that our national system shall but begin at the very beginning, and follow up the child from stage to stage of his growth, meeting his practical needs as they arise in the natural order of things.

The school system must have the moral support of School Boards, elected by the parents of the children, or it will not work.

But, I would add in conclusion, I have based the hopeful view I have taken upon one most important assumption, which must not be lost sight of. I end where I began. The Education Minister, and the staff of his department in Downing Street, aided by the clergy and a few philanthropists in the country, will never alone be able to accomplish the task involved in 'national education.' I see no rays of daylight through the difficulties, I see no chance of overcoming them, unless the twenty-four million ordinary intellects which Mr. Carlyle speaks of, can be enlisted in the work. Ten thousand parish schools provided by the richer classes, managed by the clergy, and giving education as a sort of supplementary out-door relief to the poorer classes, will never succeed in getting the children of the ten thousand parishes of England to school, much less in giving them that training which is needful to fit them for the battle

of life. Unless the schools are felt to be the people's schools, unless the school system has the moral support of boards elected by the parents, unless the employers of labour themselves serve on the boards, and so commit themselves to the necessity and feasibility of making schooling fit in with earning, I see no chance of success.

The dream in which some indulge, that in the rural parishes at all events, it will be best to shirk the action of the Act and to let well alone, leaving the schools in the sole hands of the clergy, is itself, as it seems to me, one of the greatest hindrances in the way of success. It is a hindrance second only to that which, for a generation at least, *has* actually stopped up the way—I mean the dream of the voluntaryists, that we should let well alone and leave all education to voluntary effort. But I have faith that, as the nation has been recently awakened from the one dream, so it will presently be awakened from the other. The nation, I hope, is rubbing its eyes already: and that it will awake from it *soon* is the great assumption on which all the hopeful views I have taken are based.

On that assumption I have ventured to state in the simplest way possible the general principles on which, as it seems to me, national compulsory education may be made to work, and how its difficulties can be met. I have not tried to lower the popular estimate of the magnitude of the work which has to be accomplished; but I confess I

have been anxious to show that however great the work, success is not hopeless, and despair not wise.

HITCHIN: *November 1870.*

## P.S.—ON EDUCATION IN THE PLAITING DISTRICTS.

The plaiting district extends over the greater part of the three counties of Hertford, Bedford, and Buckingham, and embraces a population roughly estimated at 300,000. Taking one in six of the population as the proportion of the children of the working-classes who ought to be in attendance at day schools, they ought to contain 50,000 children.

Plaiting district contains 50,000 children within the school age.

These estimates include the towns of Luton and Dunstable, where bonnet-sewing almost entirely takes the place of plaiting.

The first fact to be noticed is that undoubtedly, under present arrangements, both plaiting and bonnet-sewing very seriously interfere with the education of children, especially girls.

First, as to plaiting —

In the 28 parishes in the Hitchin Union the population was, in 1861, 25,600. There ought to have been, therefore, at least, 4,260 children of the working classes at the elementary schools. In 1862 there were only 2,646 at the elementary schools; and in 1869, with an increased population, only 3,085. That is to say, about one-third of the children who ought to have been at school were not at school, and how far plaiting was the cause of their absence may be judged by the fact that in 1862 950

Plaiting keeps them from school.

children (294 boys and 656 girls), and in 1869, 481 children (96 boys and 385 girls) were actually at dames' plaiting schools, where practically nothing but plaiting is taught.

Secondly, as to bonnet-sewing at Luton —

And so  
does  
bonnet-  
sewing at  
Luton.

The population of Luton is about 18,000. There ought to be present at school one in six, or 3,000 children. There are only 1,470; so that there are 1,500 children, or about one-half of the whole number, whose education is being neglected. The deficiency is chiefly in girls. In the National and British Schools there are 370 boys and 180 girls. The fact also that the number of infants (690 out of 1,470) is nearly one-half of the whole number, shows that the deficiency lies in the children of the higher ages, who are doubtless at work instead of at school.

16,000  
children  
not being  
educated.

If these instances may be taken as samples of the educational deficiencies of the whole plaiting district, it must embrace somewhere about 16,000 or 17,000 children whose education is being neglected.

Plaiting  
and educa-  
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really  
incom-  
patible.

There is an impression abroad that because of the evils incident to plaiting, it ought to be discouraged. I do not share this opinion. I believe it would be difficult to conceive of an employment for females and children which, under proper organisation, would be less attended with evils. It is not an unhealthy occupation, like that of the London seamstress. It is a fireside occupation, which no one surely would willingly exchange for that of the Yorkshire or Lancashire mill girl. If it be attended with evils, it is because the plaiting girls are allowed to grow up without being taught

anything but plaiting, and because they are not properly taught even that. With increased care and cleanliness and intelligence, the earnings of plaiters would increase. Foreign plaiters are competing more and more every year with English plaiters. They already beat us in cheap plaits, and it is only the really skilled and careful plaiters that in the long run will maintain their earnings. England produces the best straw, and what is wanting in this, as in so many other departments of industry, is *skilled* labour and quickness of adaptation to the changing demands of the market.

Education, therefore, and the organisation in the plaiting which Compulsory Education would involve, would in the long run be the very best thing for the plaiters, and tend to raise their earnings.

I have admitted that left as it is at present, unorganised and even discouraged by those who ought to organise it, plaiting does and must inevitably interfere with the attendance of children at school. But there seems upon close examination nothing inherently antagonistic between it and education, and no reason why plaiting should interfere with the children going to school, if only proper arrangements are made to adapt the schools to the needs of the district.

For the facts as regards plaiting seem to be as follows:—

On the one hand, it is needful for children to learn plaiting, and to practise it daily under eight years of age ; but, on the other hand, it is not needful for children under that age to plait many hours a day, nor do the

Children  
must *learn*  
to plait  
under  
eight, but



do not *earn* much by it. earnings of children amount to anything very considerable, until they are about eight years old.

I placed the following printed question in the hands of the leading plait dealers in different parts of the district:—

In order to become good plaiters, is it needful for children to begin plaiting many hours a day before they are seven or eight years old? Do you think that they can earn anything by plaiting before that age, and do you think it injures them to do so?

I received the following replies:—

Plait Dealer, No. 1.—For children to become good plaiters it is very important that they should begin plaiting when young, but not at all needful to be plaiting many hours a day before they are eight years old. Although some have begun plaiting when only four or five, their earnings under eight are very trifling. I believe it to be injurious to them to be plaiting (as some have and still do) eight or ten hours a day before that age.

Ditto, No. 2.—No. Very little. Yes; they ought to be at play.

Ditto, No. 3.—I think they should be put to plaiting about three hours a day, and I think they can earn something before they are eight years of age, and it would not injure their health.

Ditto, No. 4.—It is needful to begin to plait young, but not necessary many hours. From five to eight years old five hours a day would be enough. During these years children often earn as much as their mothers, and it does them no harm.

Ditto, No. 5.—One or two hours from six to eight. I should say one hour in the forenoon, and one hour in the afternoon from six to eight.

Ditto, No. 6.—We do not think it injures children to



work a few hours daily at plaiting (say six hours), and it is necessary they should begin at an early age, and they can earn money before they attain the age of eight years.

There is some little difference of opinion shown in the answers, but it is very much neutralised by the fact that the plait buyers as a general rule will not touch the plait of children under eight years old. The children, in order to learn to plait, must make plait, and the plait they make, if worth no more than the straw, must still be sold to provide a fresh supply. The children's plait, though it finds its way to market through the little shops and jobbers, is made irrespective of whether any actual profit is got upon it or not.

The following analysis of a fortnight's work of seventy-four plaiters, whose plait was bought by one dealer on one round, in December 1869, will illustrate this subject :

Age	Number of Plaiters	Scores	Price per Score	Average	Total gross earnings	Gross average weekly earning each
8 — 12	14	135	<i>d.</i> 3½ — <i>d.</i> 9	<i>d.</i> 5¾	£ 3 5 6	<i>s.</i> 2 <i>d.</i> 4
13 — 20	15	200	4 — 15	7½	6 6 7	4 3
21 — 30	23	209	6 — 15	8¼	7 5 9	3 2
31 — 40	7	58	5 — 12	7½	1 16 0	2 7
41 — 50	10	98	4 — 12	7	2 16 6	2 10
51 — 60	5	30	6 — 10	8½	1 1 3	2 1
	74	730	3½ 15	7½	22 11 7	3s.

These figures do not show the actual nett earnings of the plaiters, because in all cases the cost of the straw is included in the amount, and where

the price of the plait is low, it would absorb a large part of the profit. They show, however, by the variations in price how important it is that children should be taught to plait *well*, and that though a great deal of plait is made by little children, not much money is made by them till they are more than eight years old.

Boys as well as girls may well sometimes learn to plait.

The necessity of learning to plait when young applies chiefly to girls. But on the whole it does not appear that it would be well to altogether ignore or discourage plaiting in the case of boys. There is no doubt that it gives a boy another string to his bow, so that if temporarily out of work or permanently disabled by ill-health or accident from out-door-work, he has at hand a means of gaining a livelihood which often prevents his becoming a burden on his friends or on the parish.

I draw this conclusion from the replies I have received to the question—

Do you think that it is needful for boys in this district to practise plaiting?

Plait Dealer, No. 1.—In some respects it is not needful, but as there is always a market for it, and some who have practised it can earn their living when there is no other employment for them, it would be well if it were practised more.

Ditto, No. 2. (Hemel Hempstead).—Not in this district, there being an abundance of employment in paper mills and agriculture.

Ditto, No. 3.—I do, as there are more boys than the agriculturists can employ.

Ditto, No. 4.—Yes, there are some very good plaiting men, who during frosts, when there is no agricultural

employment, have no other means of keeping their families.

Ditto, No. 5.—Yes.

Ditto, No. 6.—They must either do this or starve in the winter months.

Manufacturer, No. 1.—Not really needful; yet in cases of failure of health and employ it becomes helpful. Probably less than 5 per cent. of our plaits are made by men and boys.

Ditto, No. 2.—Yes; decidedly, from eight to twelve years of age.

Ditto, No. 3.—I am opposed to men and boys plaiting. I think it a great evil and very injurious and engendering idle habits: they become poachers and loose in their conduct.

Now if the needs of the district require that children must be taught to plait early, the question arises, Where are they to be taught to plait?

Where are children to be taught to plait?

At present they are taught in dames' schools held in ill-ventilated rooms. They are kept long hours at plaiting, and taught practically nothing else but plaiting, and they are not taught even that really well. Seeing that children under eight years old need not plait very long hours, why should they not be taught plaiting along with other things in infant schools, being part of the day taught plaiting by a mistress chosen expressly because she can teach plaiting well, and other parts of the day other things by the ordinary schoolmistress?

They are now taught badly in dames' schools, and taught nothing else.

Why should not they be taught plaiting well in infant schools and other things besides?

There are schools now where plaiting is introduced, and they have not altogether proved failures, even although, from want of funds, the same mistress has taught both plaiting and other things,

There are such schools,

and consequently nothing has been taught as well as it should be.

As regards the attendance of children, the experience of these schools shows that by the judicious introduction of plaiting into infant schools, it may be made a help instead of a hindrance to education, inasmuch as experience shows that such schools where plaiting is introduced are attractive to children in the plaiting districts, and preferred by the parents to the dames' plaiting schools.

The following is a statement of the number of children in the several classes of schools in the parish of Hitchin in November 1869:—

	Boys.	Girls.	Boys.	Girls.
(1) National and British Schools where no plaiting is allowed :				
Day Schools . . . .	306	168	} 577	264
Infant Schools . . .	126	96		
Night Schools . . .	145	0		

[St. Saviour's School, 70 infants in addition to the above.]

- (2) Schools in which elementary education  
is given and plaiting is allowed . . . 72 153
- (3) Dames' Plaiting School . . . . 41 94

These figures show how plaiting interferes with the attendance of children (especially girls) at schools from which it is excluded ; but how, on the other hand, the plaiting girls do attend schools at which plaiting is allowed.

The parish of Pirton also affords a striking illustration. The population in 1861 was 1,023 ; there

and they  
are pre-  
ferred to  
dames'  
schools.

should therefore be 1 in 6, or 170 children at school. In 1862 there were 40 children in the National School, from which plaiting was excluded, and 109 in the dames' plaiting schools—149 in all. In 1869, plaiting having in the meantime been introduced in the National School, it contained 179 children, and the dames' plaiting schools only about 24—203 children in all ; that is to say, whilst plaiting was excluded from the National School, two-thirds of the children were not attending it. Plaiting being introduced into it, nearly all the children in the parish appear to be in attendance.

Were such infant schools established, there would appear to be no special hardships likely to arise from the application of the principle of the Work-shops Regulation Act to the industrial occupations of the plaiting district so far as to prohibit children's labour under eight years of age, provided that the sale of the children's plait were not interfered with when made either at the elementary schools or at the children's homes. This latter exception would be needful, or the cost of the straw used by the children in practising plaiting would be sacrificed.

The Work-shops Regulation Act might be made to apply to plaiters under eight years old, with some modification.

The same observations apply to some extent to bonnet-sewing at Luton and Dunstable. The actual sewing of plait into hats and bonnets probably could not easily be introduced like plaiting into the elementary schools ; but if the girls were well taught plain needlework and the general use of the needle, it could not but be a valuable preparation for the occupation in which so many

of them will be afterwards employed. And if in these towns particular stress were laid upon sewing, the advantages of the schools would, it is believed, be all the more appreciated by parents.

Conclusion  
as to  
children  
under  
eight years  
old.

What is needed, then, to convert the industrial employments of the plaiting district, from a hindrance of education into a help, is, to begin at the beginning, a thorough system of infant or very elementary schools in which plaiting (and at Luton and Dunstable plain sewing) should be well taught along with the ordinary branches of elementary instruction, and in which the first difficulties and drudgery of education may be got through before the age at which plaiting or sewing for a living, or work in the fields, commence.

Such schools are needed in every hamlet and village and town (for little children cannot trudge far along country lanes to school), and, if open to very young children, the introduction into them of plaiting and sewing would probably go a long way towards preventing the necessity of compulsion often being resorted to to ensure attendance. They would be so much more efficient than ordinary dames' plaiting schools or sewing schools, that they could hardly fail to be popular with parents.

And there would seem to be no real reason why, under proper arrangement and inspection, such schools should not be thoroughly efficient.

The half-time principle may well be

With regard to the schooling of children above eight years old, it is probable that no insuperable difficulty would arise in the application of the



further provisions of the Workshops Act, as to the half-time system of schooling, to children engaged both in plaiting and sewing as well as in agricultural labour.

applied  
to plait-  
ing above  
eight years  
old,

The half-time system has for a time, at least, been tried in the parish of Houghton, near Dunstable, under the arrangement of the Rev. Hugh Smyth. The dames' plaiting schools were closed by arrangement with the vicar five afternoons during the week, and open on the other days only to children who produced certificates of attendance at the elementary schools, and the result was that the number of children at the elementary schools rose from 80 to nearly 250, or one in six of the population.

But whilst I see no insuperable difficulty in the way of the application of the half-time system to plaiting, I may be allowed to urge again that the success of the half-time system after eight years old would depend upon the years before eight not being lost. Half the battle would be won if a good foundation had already been laid in the infant schools, and if the first drudgery of elementary education had been got through before the working-age came.

if preceded  
by infant  
schools as  
proposed.

This first point gained, then a shorter number of hours' schooling per day, spread over a longer period of years, would be exactly what, from a purely educational point of view, would be likely to work best. Too much stress can hardly be laid upon this point. The great difficulty which the whole-time system of schooling has hitherto had to



encounter is that the children, leaving school too early, have been too much in the habit of forgetting their education almost as fast as they got it.

Lastly, in addition to the half-time schools, there would be required in almost every parish separate classes if not separate schools for those children above eight years old, who, not being engaged in labour, would require whole-time schools. This, I think, would apply to the boys who intend to be occupied in farm labour. There seems to be a growing feeling amongst farmers, that farm labour need not commence till ten. These boys would therefore require whole-time schooling from eight to ten, and after ten the half-time schools and night schools to keep up their education, which, if it ceased absolutely at ten, would soon be lost again. There would, no doubt, be some difficulty at first in arranging what hours could be best spared from agricultural labour for the half-time schooling, and on what days it should be taken. But I confess I think much of the opposition which farmers might be apt to give to the arrangements for the schooling would probably be removed if they saw that the education given was of a practical character—that, *e.g.*, the elements of mechanics were taught in the half-time schools, so that lads might be turned out with heads on their shoulders, in some degree prepared to understand the machinery and the steam engines which now relieve the agricultural labourer of so much of the mere drudgery of work.

Hence the needs of this district seem to require

The different kinds of schools required in each parish.

in almost every parish a system of schools, embracing classes for infants, with plaiting, other classes for whole-time and half-time scholars, and night schools also. Without such a system education can never really be brought home to every child in the district.

To organise such a system will need much care and skill, and when it is organised there still will remain the task of getting the residuum of truant children to attend the schools.

How is all this to be done? I cannot conceal from myself that the ease with which it may be carried out and its ultimate success will very much depend upon the extent to which the interest of the parents and employers of labour can be enlisted in the work, and the extent to which the schools are really suited to the practical needs of the children. And I believe the only way by which in the long run the work can be done is by School Boards.

The necessity of School Boards to adjust the claims of schooling and labour and to get the children to school.

I know it is said, 'School Boards may be all very well in the towns, but they are not needed in the country.' But I believe they *are* needed in the country, and I regret very much the aversion with which I see the clergy and managers of schools regard them.

There seems to be a notion that a School Board must meddle with existing schools. It need not do any such thing. All it will have to do will be to fill up what gaps there may be in the system. And having done so, it will have enough to do to

look after the children, to adjust the rival claims of labour and schooling, to spare the schoolmaster from doing the work of the police, to pay the school fees of children in cases of poverty, and to see that, the Education Act having passed, the children of the rural districts get the benefit of it as well as those who live in towns.

And they  
are wanted  
at once.

Finally, if School Boards are needful, let them be elected at once. They will need educating themselves, as all of us do to any fresh work which we take in hand. In any case they will not get fairly into harness one day too soon.

We may prevent Boards being forced upon us under the Act, by taking pains to show at the end of the year, that there is sufficient and suitable school accommodation in our parish, and in the majority of rural parishes this may easily be done. But for the sake of the 16,000 or 17,000 children in the plaiting districts, whose education is being neglected, *do not let us do that!* In three or four years those 16,000 or 17,000 children will have passed the school age, and gone forth untrained into the battle of life. And whose fault will it be? It will be the fault of those in whose hands the Education Act of 1870 has placed the power of securing to these children their rights, but who, from some motive or other, refused or neglected to use this power till 1874.

F. S.